

Book review: Writing for peer reviewed journals—strategies for getting published

By Pat Thomson and Barbara Kamler. (Eds.). (London and New York: Routledge, 2013). 190 pp., ISBN 978-0415809313

Based on their long history of publishing, reviewing, editing and facilitating workshops, Pat Thomson and Barbara Kamler have written a very helpful book for anyone who wants to publish in international academic journals. The authors address a wide audience ranging from researchers in the beginning of their career to even experienced scholars for whom this book can be very helpful in their role as supervisors of research work. Thomson and Kamler organise their book on the basis of nine chapters that systematically describe the steps and considerations to be made when preparing, writing and improving journal articles, but also on how to collaborate with others, on how to engage with reviewers, editors and peer academics. The authors themselves, in their introductory chapter, present a useful overview of the nine chapters. This is helpful for the readers who don't want to go through the entire text from beginning to end, but who prefer to focus on one or other aspect of the publishing task.

They start with some relevant reflections on the necessity of publishing internationally, for researchers throughout their entire career (chapter 1). Writing and publishing is a core feature of an academic identity. And of course, when one writes it is very important to reflect on the discourse community one wants to engage in, or in other words, what reader will be addressed (chapter 2). Today, for whatever discipline, there are innumerable journals available, ranging from general to specialised, and from high to low ranked publication channels. To make a good selection, when one wants to have a paper published, is not an easy task. It can be helpful to screen various journals in one's own discipline, and furthermore, to look what kind of publications appear in particular journals. It is also very important to consider the mission statement of the journal and have a look at who the editors are and how the editorial board is composed. This reveals information about the general orientation of the journal, its preferences for qualitative or quantitative, or for theoretical or empirical contributions. A next step is to make clear for oneself and for the potential discourse community what the contribution will be about (chapter 3). Here, Thomson and Kamler present a very relevant and practical tool for writing abstracts that they call 'the tiny text'. The suggestion is not to wait with the writing of the abstract until the paper is finished, but to consider both the title of the paper and the abstract already from the beginning of the work. This is very helpful for the writer to clarify the focus of the contribution. The authors suggest, when preparing the abstract, to consider four moves: first the author locates the paper in the chosen discourse community; in the second place, the focus of the paper is delineated; in the third place the report is clarified, which means outlining the research, sample, method of analysis; the final move is the argument, which summarizes the point of view of the author regarding the findings to be presented in the paper. In the next chapter 'So What', the authors reflect on the five challenges that early career writers often struggle with (chapter 4). These are: drowning in details; trying to say it all; writing without a reader in mind; struggling to find the angle and the worries about being 'out there' in the international research community. In connection with these challenges more concrete suggestions are given to compose the abstract and to

‘crunch’ the title. The first four chapters are all about the preparation of the writing. Chapter five is about how the real work, the writing, is taking shape. Here the reader again learns how important the initial abstract is as a planning tool. It helps to decide about the length of the article, including the weight of every single section. It enables the author to plan how much time s/he wants to spend on every separate part. And it keeps the writer on track, while moving forward. Furthermore, in chapter 5, Thomson and Kamler suggest the researcher to create a research space (CARS) for him/herself, or to delineate a specific niche for the contribution-in-progress. This means that the author has to make clear what the specific added value of the contribution will be, against the backdrop of other papers that have dealt with similar issues. All these actions result into the writing of the first draft, and then into the refining of this draft (chapter 6). In that chapter we learn about the use of (sub-)headings, the development of a meta-commentary and finally about the importance of writing a clear conclusion that makes a claim about the value of the contribution. Now the final version can be made ready and sent to the journal. The author may expect in most cases minor or major revisions or even a rejection of the paper (chapter 7). When working on the revisions, the author is expected to carefully deal with all comments of the reviewers, even when s/he does not agree with some of them. In a response letter the disagreement is then clarified. Chapter 8 presents the benefits and complexities of collaboration when writing a paper together with colleagues. It also discusses the delicate issue of asymmetrical collaborations. And, in the final chapter some ideas are elaborated about how a dissertation can be the basis for a long term planning of several articles in diverse publication channels.

The authors have been organising writing workshops around the world for many years. The book reflects that vast experience. Their disciplinary background is education. Many of the examples come from that domain. However, the examples and suggestions are valuable for a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The blurb of this publication says that ‘this lively book uses a combination of personal stories, student texts, published journal abstracts and excerpts from interviews with journal editors and publishers’. It furthermore suggests that ‘it is written in an accessible style and that it offers a collegial approach to a task which is difficult for most scholars, regardless of their years of experience’. Not one single word of this text is incorrect. I have read the book, which is indeed about one of the most difficult tasks of academic life, with lots of interest and recognition. I’ve also been able to use it as the basis for a workshop with PhD students. Also at that occasion, the book has shown its usefulness. So, I can advice it to anyone in academia who struggles with the hard work of writing and publishing. That is: to everyone.

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